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Gaming among Enslaved Africans in the Americas, and its Uses in Navigating Social Interactions

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Gaming Among Enslaved Africans in the Americas, and its Uses in
Navigating Social Interactions

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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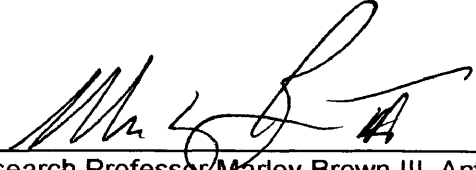
Master of Arts


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ABSTRACT PAGE

Gaming pieces are a common find at archaeological sites associated with enslaved Africans in the Americas. Two of the most visible types of these pieces are clay marbles and small ceramic pieces that are usually disc or rhomboid shaped. Marbles is a well recorded game that is still played in the modern day. The ceramic pieces, however, were probably used in a lesser known game once popular with the Igbo of West Africa called Igba-ita. An African game that has world-wide popularity, Mancala, was likely also played by enslaved Africans in the Americas, though the game leaves few archaeological markers.

These games functioned as both a medium for leisure time activities and a means of negotiating the social world for the enslaved. By choosing to play a certain game in a certain way, enslaved Africans were expressing themselves as individuals. When they won or lost a game, they could affect their social standing within their community. Ethnographic accounts from Africa contain much evidence showing the affects games like Mancala could have on a person's status. When Europeans enslaved Africans and brought them to the new world, they took away much of the Africans' control over their environment. Nevertheless, by becoming skilled in Mancala or Igba-ita, an enslaved African could gain power among his peers. In addition, by choosing to play these games from their or their ancestors' homelands, the enslaved Africans reaffirmed their African identity.

This thesis explores these ideas with a case study of four archaeological sites in Barbados. This former British colony was once the home of a large population of enslaved Africans. Here, as elsewhere, the enslaved made and used gaming pieces to escape the rigorous labor demands of their enslavers and create their own place in the society of their peers. The remains of these activities left in the archaeological record can help modern researchers to better understand the world of the enslaved.

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Introduction

Games are activities that can entertain, frustrate, or facilitate competition, rivalry, political action and negotiations of status between various members of society. Players can utilize games to highlight a particular skill or personal style. It can sometimes be difficult to discern a game from other social activities. This paper will follow the criteria outlined by Roberts, et al (1959) for defining what constitutes a game; which are as follows: "(1) organized play, (2) competition, (3) two or more sides, (4) criteria for determining the winner, and (5) agreed-upon rules". Thus, since games are activities where there are winners and losers, it follows that they are a social interaction that can be used to assert a position in a society.

The investigation of games and social play articulates with three major concepts in anthropological and archaeological theory: identity, agency, and power. Games can be very personal, and certain types of games can be ascribed to particular groups of people. For example, games are usually categorized according to the age group and sometimes gender of who is perceived as the typical player. Modern western examples are marbles, which is considered a children's game; and Gin, which is usually associated with senior citizens. Largely due to the influences of media, our society also has many stereotypes for people who play certain games, like the cowboy who plays poker, or the secret agent who gambles thousands at the baccarat table. When someone in our society chooses a game to play, he or she is often also making a conscious or unconscious statement about his or her identity (or desired identity).

The theoretical concept of agency explores people's ability to make choices, particularly about different actions they will take. The choice to play a certain game described above is one example of the agency framed through gaming. However, it goes much further. Games are the social creations of the players, in both the sense of the physical pieces required and the meaning that surrounds them. Games are also social rituals filled with rules that are explicitly defined and integral to a game being played correctly. However, people can still choose to break those rules and accept whatever consequences might arise from such an action. For example, if such rule breaking is discovered in many games, the person who committed the act can be required to leave the game and subsequently can be labeled with a title such as 'cheater' that will impact their further ability to engage in the social ritual of gaming.

Power can also be acquired and maintained through gaming. Power is the ability of a person or people to exercise control over one or more aspects of their environment (Miller and Tilley 1984:5). This is one of the easiest social processes to observe during gaming. Adept gamers hold power during games by using their skills to manipulate and defeat their opponents. In the modern western world, several people have achieved fame through their prowess at certain games. Chess masters have books and movies documenting their lives and gaming careers, and large matches are televised worldwide. Recently, gambling games, such as Poker, have become extremely popular, and are also widely televised. Men and women who are skilled in these games can gain

power in other aspects of their lives through the material wealth and social prestige that often follows their victories.

While it is easy to see these concepts at work in modern gaming, it is also important to try to understand their social meaning and significance for past societies. Games have been a part of social life for millennia (Piccione 1980), and as Dielter explained in an article on feasting,

...it is essential for archaeologists to come to grips with the arenas of social action in which, and the sets of practices by which, the micropolitics of daily life are played out. This is the only way we will move beyond mechanistic typological reductionism in understanding historical transformations of various relations of power and in addressing such perennial issues as the development of social stratification and political centralization. [2001:66].

Thus, this thesis will explore how identity, agency, and power are expressed through gaming in the context of the games of enslaved Africans. Archaeological investigations at sites associated with enslaved peoples in North America and the Caribbean have yielded numerous gaming pieces in the form of reworked ceramic pieces, marbles, and ballast stones. Ethnographic studies in Africa offer a great deal of insight into how games are part of social negotiations within various African cultures and Afro-Creole societies in the Americas. These studies cannot act as direct analogies, however, since the social and physical settings of the enslaved Africans and Afro-Creoles in the Americas differed greatly from the Africans on the continent. As a result, these concepts must be

explored in terms of how the enslaved might have modified the meanings and uses of gaming to fit within their altered environment.

As with most populations, the enslaved communities of Colonial America were made up of a variety of people: young and old, male and female, specialized and unspecialized laborers. When discussing slavery in the Americas, one usually thinks of large plantations with enslaved Africans being forced to perform seemingly impossible acts of physical labor. While this is a true and valid imagining, one must also keep in mind that the enslaved Africans were not only laborers, they were also individuals who were part of a dynamic community. During their precious free time, enslaved Africans participated in social interactions and lived their own unique lives. Historical records provide hints about the games they played, but since slave owners were the primary authors of written documents, they must be taken with a grain of salt. As William Wiethoff (2006) has pointed out, the accuracy of White narratives must be questioned since they “provide deliberated reflections on White experiences rather than spontaneous declarations” (432). Slave owners and others could and did misrepresent facts about slavery in order to protect their character and standing in the eyes of their peers and community. Archaeological investigations, however, do not discriminate in the same way. While most of the artifacts associated with these social interactions will not survive in the archaeological record, such as seeds and other organic materials, some, such as ceramic gaming discs, do.

One role of the games played by enslaved peoples in the Americas was a welcome respite from the extreme labor conditions they faced daily. It is also likely that they affected social relations among the enslaved. The games would have been personal acts since they required the enslaved to choose and modify materials from their environment to create the pieces necessary to play a game. This was also a social act from their native Africa that would be difficult for slave owners to control. From ethnographic research, it is also known that in Africa, individuals who were adept at gaming held a special, exalted status in their community. In Ganda, a new king had to play (and win) a ritual game of *Mancala* to prove that he was worthy of the throne (Townshend 1979:794-795). In a setting where so many aspects of their lives were controlled and dictated for them others, it is easy to imagine that the enslaved embraced the social power they could attain through gaming, which again, would have been difficult for slave owners to control. Thus, for the enslaved, gaming had many more meanings and uses than simply a diversion during leisure time.

These concepts will be explored in a case study of Barbados, where gaming pieces have been found in excavations throughout the island. Through analogies available in the form of ethnographic studies of the role of gaming elsewhere in the Americas and Africa and the archaeological evidence of gaming, aspects of the social lives of the enslaved on Barbados that are not present in written records can be better understood. Hopefully, these insights can provide people in the present with a better understanding of the lives of the enslaved, not only in Barbados, but also in the New World at large.

Evidence for Gaming among Enslaved Africans in the Americas

A Brief History of Slavery in the Caribbean and United States

The institution of slavery arose in different areas of the Americas at different times. In the Caribbean, the transatlantic market for enslaved Africans developed during the 16th century (Klein 1986:15-16). Initially, though, European laborers outnumbered enslaved Africans in this area, as they would in North America. This changed in the mid-17th century when the Dutch introduced the British to the sugar cane industry, a process that required much more intensive labor than the tobacco and other crops the British colonists formerly favored. By the end of the 17th century, enslaved Africans greatly outnumbered European colonists on Caribbean islands like Barbados, and the era of large-scale sugar plantations had begun (Klein 1986:49-51). In North America, the institution of slavery took about a century to become widespread. The first enslaved Africans were brought to the area in the early 1600s, but slavery was not an integral part of the economy until the early 1700s, when enslaved Africans first outnumbered European colonists in some areas of the southern United States. There is some debate as to why North American colonists began using the labor of enslaved Africans, but it seems that the transition was made after planters had difficulties finding Native American and European laborers on the new plantations that were arising on the continent (Morgan 2001:26-43).

While the enslaved were stripped of most, if not all, of their material possessions before and during their forced transatlantic voyage, they still

retained the ideas, practices and memories of the African continent (Handler 2009b:12). While the enslaved could not replicate the practices of their homelands exactly, they used and borrowed what they could from their new environment and neighbors in order to keep some of their traditions alive (Thornton 1998:206-210). One of these preserved traditions was the favored leisure time activities and games of the enslaved. The memory of games was possibly aided by the fact that at least some slave traders and ship captains supposedly encouraged the enslaved to bring games with them on their transatlantic voyage, or provided the games for the enslaved (Handler 2009b:11). The constant flow of new enslaved African arrivals throughout the 16th to the early 19th centuries also helped keep the memories and knowledge of games from the African continent alive.

The horrors and hardships associated with the condition of enslavement are well known; and they continued until the 1880s, when Cuba and Brazil were the last countries to grant freedom to their enslaved (Scott 1988). It is important for scholars to study the lives of the enslaved so that their voices will continue to be heard. The renowned anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1990) argued that cultural continuities existed between Africans living in West Africa and African descendants living in the Americas in the 17th-19th centuries, and thus it is useful to examine gaming on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, many of the most popular games exist in Africa and the Americas with only slight variations in the way they are played, such as Mancala. Most games played in both locations require either no material culture or perishable organic materials, such as sticks,

and in the case of Mancala, seeds. Some of the most popular children's games include an oral component that involves singing songs and making poetry (Simmons 1958). For this reason, and given the limitations of the archaeological record, this study will focus on games that have the best chance of being materialized in the archaeological record.

Popular African Games and their Presence in North America and the Caribbean

Arguably, the most well known game from Africa is Mancala or *Wari* (also spelled *Warri*). This game is present throughout Africa, especially West Africa, which was the departure point for many enslaved peoples headed for the Americas, in many variations. For example, among the Igbo, the game is usually called *Azigo* or *Okwe*. In Igbo areas, a wooden board is used with two rows of depressions to hold the beans that act as playing pieces (Zaslavsky 1973:121). In other versions, the rows of depressions, up to four, are made in the sand, and a variety of materials are used as gaming pieces, including stones and seeds (See Figure 1). In all versions, the game play is fairly similar, with players taking turns picking up, distributing, and capturing the gaming pieces in the various depressions. It is interesting to note that the variations of this game played in the Caribbean are most similar to those played in the regions of Africa where slave ships bound for the islands originated (Peek and Yankah 2004:238-239). While the origins of this game is not well known, there are decorative game boards that were used as gifts of prestige in several collections that are thought to be centuries old. The popularity of this game was immense, and it

was a common activity to play during ceremonies and festivals (Ibid).

Ethnographic accounts from the Caribbean in the early 1900s provide several interesting details about the game's place in the society of African descendants. Adult males are considered the official players who use proper boards and pieces, but almost all members of the community play the game amongst themselves (Herskovits 1932). Men will not play against women because losing to a woman is considered a deathblow to a man's reputation (Ibid). In addition, children will often play amongst themselves by digging holes in the ground to serve as the board, and will use any handy materials as playing pieces (Cruikshank 1929:180; Herskovits 1932). A later ethnographic account from Africa lists similar traditions as being present there (Townshend 1979). The implications and meanings that can be gleaned from gaming's place in the enslaved and freed African societies in the New World will be further discussed later.



Figure 1: Owela, a version of Mancala played in Namibia (from Peek and Yankah 2004:239)

In Mancala, smooth, round gaming pieces are ideal since players rapidly scoop them out of depressions in the earth or from a wooden board (Ken Kelly, Listserv message, 5 Feb. 2009). At present, several collections of small, smooth artifacts are the center of a debate whether they are the elusive evidence for Wari in North America. While historical evidence confirms the presence of the game in the Caribbean, documents are intriguingly silent about its presence in North America. At the Hermitage site in Tennessee, some of these more functionally ambiguous artifacts have been found along with other items that are generally accepted to be gaming pieces. The first set is a collection of smooth, flat stones, which largely resemble disc shaped ceramic gaming pieces (which will be described later) in size and shape. The second group are smaller ceramic

pieces that are triangular in shape, and very smooth. As Russell, the author of the report on this excavation, describes, these pieces were probably either the result of pottery sherds being water-worn by rain or streams or ingested by fowl and altered in their digestive system. He also explains that either of those actions could have been intentional on the part of the enslaved Africans (i.e., the pieces might have been fed to fowl or put in water) in order to acquire a desired item to use for gaming or ritual purposes (1997:74-76).

Another popular game from Africa, *Igba-ita*, is most commonly played at Igbo markets. This game is typically played with cowrie shells or coins. To play, the shells or coins are thrown (in the Igbo version, it is always a set of four), and the number of pieces that land with a certain side up or down determine a player's score (Zaslavsky 1973:113-114; Simmons 1958:30). This game, which players often make wagers on, has been called "a favorite pastime for men on market day" in Nigeria (Wilkins 2002:18). It is also used in divination practices, where again, the combination of sides the pieces land on are either considered fortunate or not (Zaslavsky 1973:54, 113-114). It is likely that *Igba-ita* is the origin for a popular game played among enslaved Africans in the Americas using ceramic gaming pieces.

The Caribbean version has been observed and described on the island of Montserrat, where it is called 'chiney money' (Pulsipher and Goodwin 1999:30). Not only are the rules to this game the same as *Igba-ita*, but the name could possibly also refer to the African tradition of using coins or cowries as pieces. In North America, an identical game has been termed "paw paw" (Piersen

1988:103). As with African versions of this game, in the American versions, a set number of the game pieces are tossed, and the number of ones that land with a certain side up or down are counted. Certain combinations gain or lose a different amount of points for the player. One of the most common forms of archaeological evidence of gaming by the enslaved in North America and the Caribbean are the ceramic pieces associated with these games. These ceramic gaming pieces are usually disk-shaped, though rhomboid pieces are also popular, about one inch or two centimeters in diameter and have decoration on one side (See Figures 2 and 3). Unfortunately, when found in archaeological contexts, archaeologists do little more than note the existence of these artifacts. For example, ceramic gaming pieces were found in multiple excavation sites and contexts associated with enslaved Africans during excavations at Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia (Parker and Hernigle 1990; Galke 1992). Yet, in these texts, the authors say little about the artifacts other than that they are common finds in contexts associated with enslaved Africans.



Figure 2: Gaming Pieces from the Moore Hill House Site, Barbados

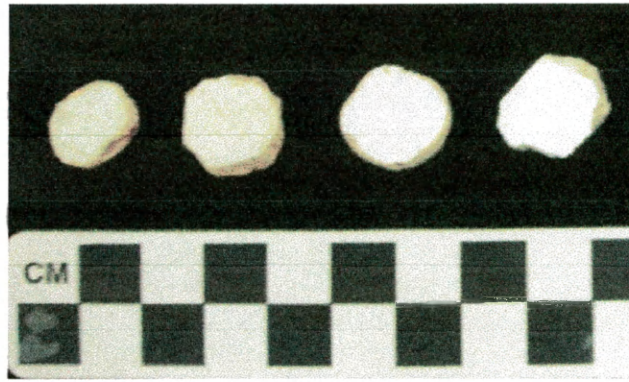


Figure 3: Reverse Side of Gaming Pieces Shown in Figure 2

Only two authors have addressed the existence of these pieces in greater detail. In 1990, Douglas Armstrong described the excavation and examination of the slave quarters of Drax Hall Plantation in Jamaica. The plantation was fairly large, and the enslaved population averaged about 300 people. Armstrong describes the gaming pieces found within the context of the slave quarters, which date to the late 18th century. According to Armstrong, that most of the pieces were made of delftware, probably because it is a softer material and would be easier to carve than other ceramics. He also postulated that they were probably used as “tokens in games of chance” (Armstrong 1990:137). On the island of Cuba, Theresa Singleton (2001) recovered a ceramic gaming piece with blue and white print in the context of enslaved living quarters on a coffee plantation. Singleton claims the piece and others like it are an example of cultural resistance. By using these gaming pieces to engage in African gaming and divination practices, the enslaved Africans were rejecting the culture of the white colonists that enslaved them (Singleton 2001:110).

One popular game in North America and the Caribbean, usually associated with young boys, has ancient and unknown origins (Acton, et al. 2006:147). This game, also well known in most of the modern world, is marbles. There are traditional African games that use marbles, and the oldest marbles found archaeologically come from Egypt (Cheska 1987; Carlisle 2009:375). At least one source, however, believes the children of African descent in the Americas played a version of the game that they learned from the children of the British colonizers. What is interesting about the versions of marbles played by the descendants of enslaved Africans, though, is that while the terminology used about and during the game is mostly of British origin, there is also a substantial amount of vocabulary derived from African languages (Winer and Boos 1993). Some tantalizing evidence that the enslaved modified this game and perhaps attributed their own cultural meanings and traditions to it appears in the archaeological record, where a variety of marbles have been found in contexts associated with enslaved Africans. At one site, slave quarters dating to the 19th century in Tennessee, marbles made of clay and inscribed with 'x's have been found. Aaron Russell, who describes these artifacts in his 1997 article (Pp. 71), explains how the markings could be related to the Kongo cosmogram. He believes that the makers of the marks used them to bring bad luck to their opponents in the games. This supports the idea that for the enslaved, gaming was more than just a leisure time activity; it was also a conduit for the acquisition and use of power, both material and spiritual.

The number of archaeological sites where archaeological evidence of gaming among the enslaved is evident is immense (in addition to already mentioned sites, see Chan 2007 and Yamin 2008 for more examples). The widespread nature of these finds indicates the importance and extent of gaming practices among the enslaved Africans in the Americas. Despite the strict labor routines imposed upon them, enslaved Africans are a group who made time for and sought the respite of leisure time and gaming. Not only was gaming a means of relaxation for the enslaved, but it was also tied to their spirituality. Enslaved Africans used special symbols to gain luck at marbles (Russell 1997:71). The Igbo also used the same methods for divination as they did for gaming- they tossed four cowrie shells and observed the outcome of the way the shells fell (Zaslavsky 1973:54;113) (the social significance of gaming in enslaved African society will be discussed later). With more attention to and knowledge of historic gaming practices among the enslaved Africans in the Americas, more archaeological evidence is sure to become known as researchers become more aware of what to look for. While marbles and Igba-ita were not the only games played by enslaved Africans, they are the most recognizable archaeologically. The archaeological evidence of Mancala can be ephemeral, but from historical accounts and its importance in African cultures, it too was likely a popular game among the enslaved. As discussed earlier, enslaved Africans frequently created their own gaming pieces or repurposed items typically used for other purposes. Thus, archaeologists should note any finds of caches of pebbles or other small items that could have been used to play Mancala and other games.

Case Study: Gaming in Barbados

Historical Background

Native Caribbean peoples were the first to inhabit the island of Barbados. Europeans first became aware of the existence of Barbados in the 1500s, though for a century they would treat it as nothing more than a place for brief respites during sea voyages and as a source of labor in the form of enslaved native peoples. The British ceremonially claimed the island in 1605, but the first European settlement was not founded there until 1625. By this time, all of the native peoples had either perished or been enslaved, and the island was uninhabited (Schomburgk 1971:255-263). The lack of inhabitants, European or otherwise, proved to be a bane to the early colonists who were mostly attempting to build a fortune through the production of cash crops, which require a significant labor force to produce notable profits. Another hindrance to early economic endeavors was the poor quality of the initial cash crops grown on the island, cotton and tobacco. Fortunately for the investors and colonists on the island, Dutch merchants and landowners who were raising sugar cane in Brazil shared their knowledge and materials with them, thus setting off the hugely profitable sugar industry on the island. The lack of labor was still an issue, however, and so the colonists began importing enslaved Africans on a large scale, a practice they formerly avoided (Dunn 2000:59-67). As Barbados judge Edward Littleton wrote in 1689, "of all the Things we have occasions for, *Negros* are the most necessary, and the most valuable" (Gragg 2003:113). The

enslaved Africans brought to Barbados were mainly from western Africa, especially from the Bight of Biafra (Smith 2008:121).

Despite their enslaved condition, the uprooted Africans on the island of Barbados, as in other places in the Americas, continued to uphold certain traditions, such as their gaming practices. An estate manager for Newton Plantation, one of the largest plantations on the island in this period, remarked that “dances, cock-fights, [and] gaming-tables were plenty on the estate” (Handler and Lange 1978:101). In 1835, just prior to emancipation, the residents of Speightstown sent an official complaint to the island’s capitol at Bridgetown that gaming was rampant in the streets, “even on the Sabbath” (Schomburgk 1971:471). The slave trade was abolished in Barbados in 1807 and the enslaved Africans on the island were emancipated in 1838, but their new condition did not lessen their need or desire for leisure time activities, such as gaming (Pinckney 1994:60). In the late 1800s, land was scarce and largely held by the former planter class. The now emancipated African labor class demanded space not only for their residences, but also for their leisure time activities. In 1887, the Barbadian government responded to this need by creating Jubilee Gardens in the heart of Bridgetown (Downes: 2002:380), which the descendants of the enslaved continue to use as a public leisure space today.

Evidence for Gaming Among Enslaved Africans in Barbados

Archaeological investigations in Jubilee Gardens and other locations on the island have revealed evidence of these gaming activities that the enslaved

and formerly enslaved engaged in. The most obvious gaming artifacts from Barbados are those discovered throughout North America and the Caribbean, ceramic pieces and marbles. However, another vital clue may be the presence of small ballast stones found in the same context as the previously mentioned artifacts. These stones, which do not originate on the island, will be discussed later.

The gaming pieces used in this study come from four archaeological sites on the island: Mason Hall, Moore Hill House, Jubilee Gardens, and the Negro Yard of St. Nicholas Abbey. The Mason Hall and Jubilee Gardens sites are located within the city of Bridgetown and have been continuously inhabited and used since the early days of the colony. Jubilee Gardens, now a park in the heart of the city, has gone through several transformations since the early 17th century, including housing an early storage cellar and functioning as a market used by enslaved people (Smith and Watson 2009:71-74). The Mason Hall site, a short walk north of Jubilee Gardens, was a residential site most likely first inhabited in the mid 17th century (Stoner, et al 2002:146-158). The Negro Yard at St. Nicholas Abbey and the Moore Hill House were likely used as residences by enslaved and newly freed Africans, respectively, who labored on the plantations in the northern part of the island (Stephanie Bergman, personal communication 2009).

It must be noted that there are several issues which prevent a definitive association between the artifacts discovered at these sites and enslaved Africans. Most notably, there is a lack of historical documentation tying these

sites to any group of people, especially in the case of the Moore Hill site. In addition, though Jubilee Gardens was a market run by vendors of African descent, the area would have also been trafficked by people of European descent. However, the large presence of people of African descent on the island (who made up more than 50% of the population by the mid 1600s (Eltis 1995:324), a percentage that continued to rise to its current level of 90% (Central Intelligence Agency 2009)), and other evidence, such as oral histories (Stephanie Bergman, personal communication 2009), lead to the conclusion that these sites were most likely occupied by people of African descent for at least a portion of the last four centuries, if not all. Therefore these four sites can convincingly, but not definitely, be associated with both urban and rural populations of African descendants from the mid 17th century to the recent past, and, importantly, all have revealed evidence of gaming activities.



Figure 4: Gaming Piece found at the Mason Hall site, Bridgetown, Barbados

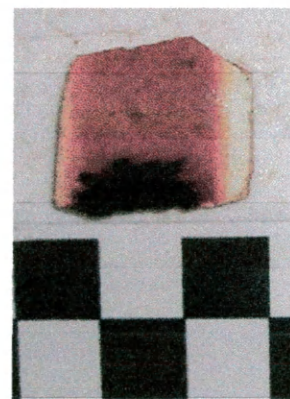
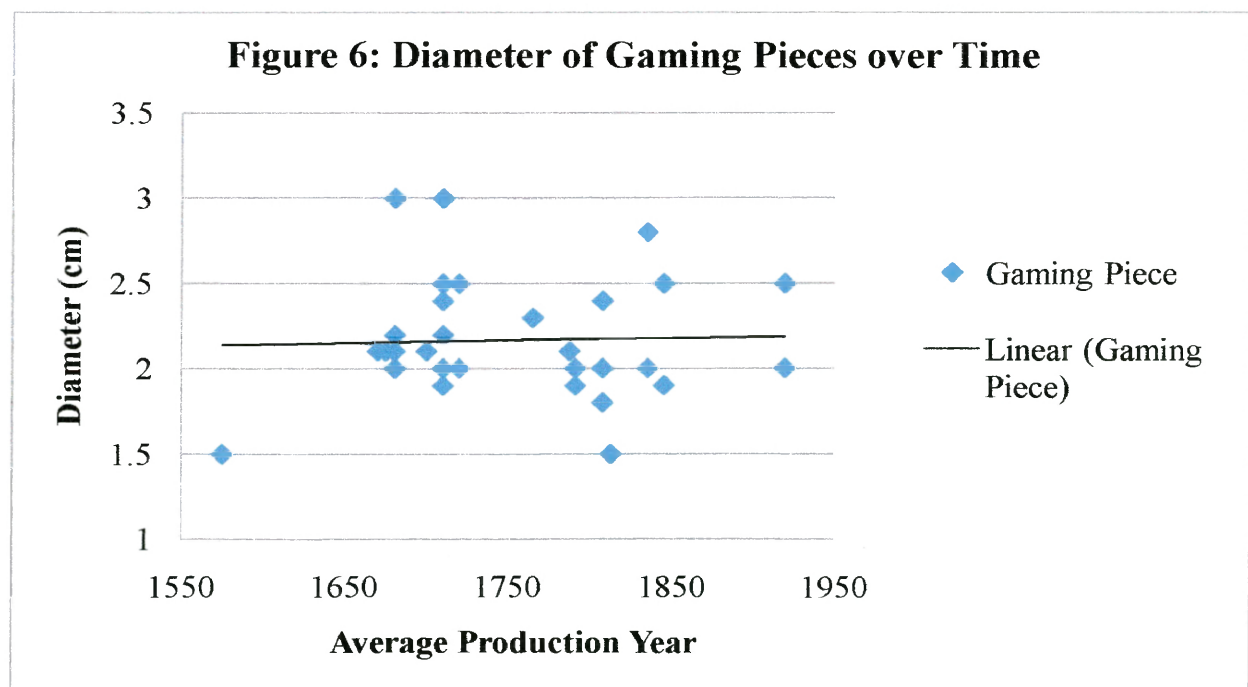


Figure 5: Gaming Piece found at the Negro Yard site, St. Nicholas Abbey, Barbados

A total of 34 ceramic gaming pieces were unearthed in these excavations (See Appendix A). While the majority were disk-shaped, there were also one

oval and several square or rhomboid pieces (see Figures 4 and 5). The average width is 2.2 cm (to determine the width of the oval piece, the longest and shortest dimensions were averaged), which is consistent with gaming pieces found elsewhere (see Armstrong 1990; Singleton 2001). While the mean production range for the ceramic types used (according to the Florida Museum of Natural History's Digital Type Collection) and the range of probable habitation for the site where these pieces were found span three centuries, the gaming pieces themselves are fairly uniform (See Figure 6). The tradition of making and using these pieces continued into the 20th century, and can still be recalled by at least one of the island's inhabitants (Stephanie Bergman, personal communication 2009). According to this inhabitant, gaming pieces were made by rubbing ceramic pieces on a rock until the desired shape was achieved. The pieces would then be used in a game similar to the ones described earlier (Igba-ita or Paw Paw).



Marbles are one of the easiest gaming pieces to recognize in the archaeological record, as the game is still popular today. Marbles were found at three of the four sites examined in Barbados- Jubilee Gardens, Mason Hall, and Moore Hill- the Negro Yard at St. Nicholas Abbey being the exception. The majority of the marbles found (14) were made of clay, and varied in size from 1.5 to 2.5 centimeters in diameter. In addition, six modern glass marbles were found at the Moore Hill site (which also contained clay marbles). As in other regions in the Americas, historical sources from Barbados indicate that playing games with marbles was associated with young boys. A 1950s newspaper column from *The Barbados Advocate* dedicated to Barbadian pastimes describes several versions of marbles games and the passion and dedication with which young boys would play. It also describes how boys would make wagers on the games using buttons (Lynch 1958). This would explain why a large quantity of buttons (57) was found in the same context as the marbles discovered at the Moore Hill site. While there is no specific mention of marbles in early historical documents from Barbados, it can be assumed that the game has a long history on the island. At the Mason Hall site, a marble was found in the fifth level of a test unit along with a pipe stem that had a bore diameter of 7/64, which has a production date in the mid to late 17th century according to the various dating techniques (see Table 1; Harrington 1954; Binford 1962; Heighon and Deagan 1971).



Figure 7: Marbles found at the Jubilee Gardens site, Bridgetown, Barbados

While Wari, the Caribbean version of Mancala, is known to be a widely popular game in the past and present (see Figure 9), archaeological evidence of the game is difficult to discover due to the ephemeral nature of the materials used to play the game (as described earlier). A historical description in Barbados published in 1750 provides a tantalizing clue that may refer to Wari pieces. In a discussion of the flora of the island, the author discusses what he calls the 'Horse Nicker Tree'. This tree, according to the author, produces small round seeds that children played with (Hughes 1972:195). In addition to this clue, excavations in



Figure 8: Ballast Stones from the Mason Hall site, Bridgetown, Barbados

Barbados may have revealed collections of playing pieces in the form of ballast stones. This interpretation has been forwarded by Frederick Smith (Smith and Watson 2007:195), and is supported by the discovery of these small stones in the vicinity of other gaming pieces at both the Jubilee Gardens and Mason Hall sites. The great majority of the island of Barbados is made of limestone, with a small area of sandstone (Stark 1903:176). This supports the idea that the metamorphic rocks found at these sites must have been imported to the island, most likely as ships' ballast. Ballast in the form of cheap materials, such as stone, was a necessary feature in sailing ships until the late 19th century, as it functioned to prevent ships from capsizing. Once ships arrived in a harbor where they were to pick up cargo, such as the one at Bridgetown, they would discard the ballast to make room for the more expensive goods (Woodman 2002). It is telling that small caches of these stones, which sailors would have considered and disposed of as trash, are found in what was a market place and a residential area. In addition, most of the ballast stones found in these contexts are fairly uniform in size, as shown in Figure 8, where the stones are all roughly 2cm long. This evidence points to selective collecting by people associated with these sites in the past. Since they are found in contexts that also contain marbles and ceramic gaming pieces, are of a shape and size deemed desirable for the game Wari (Handler 2009a), and there is a tradition for small stones being used as Mancala pieces (Peek and Yankah 2004), it is possible that they were being used for that purpose.

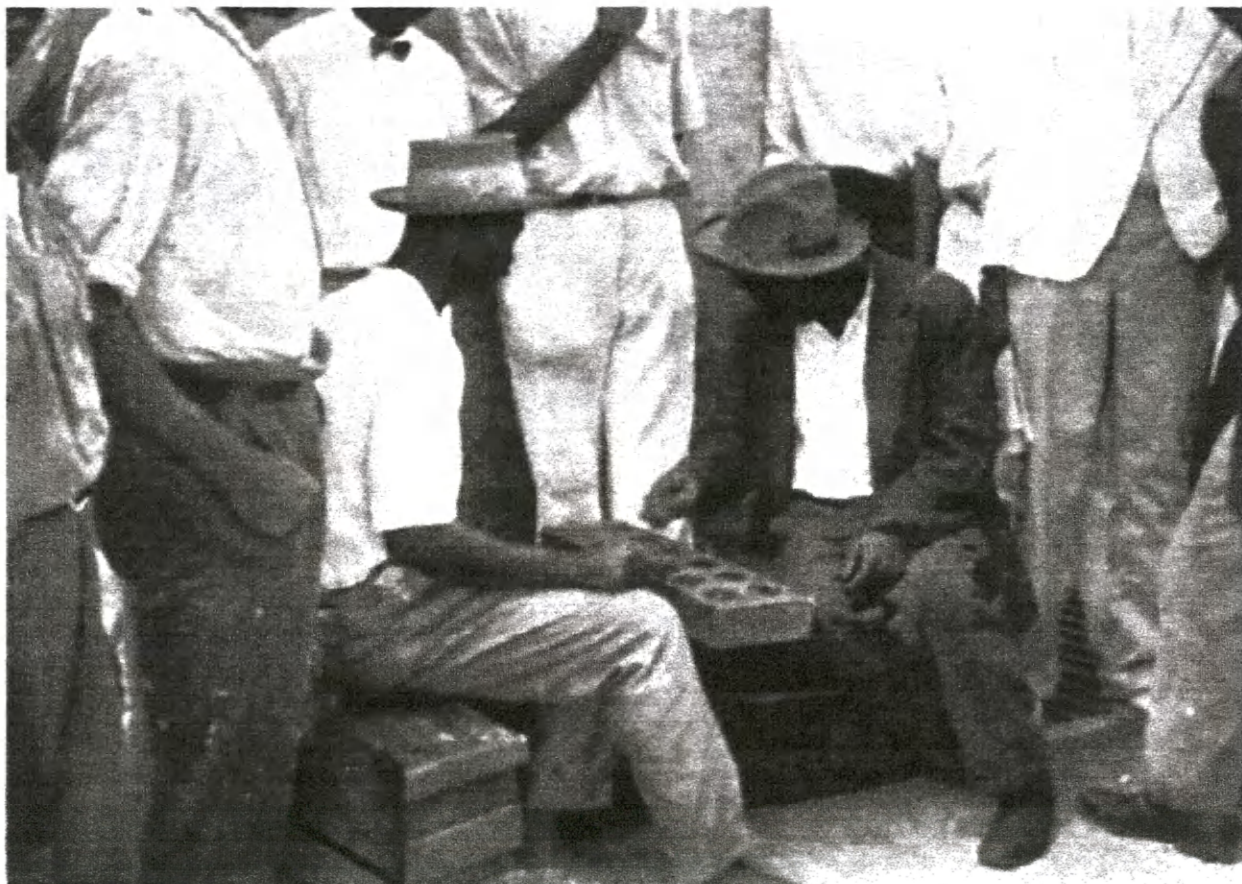


Figure 9: A historic photo from Herskovits (1932); original caption, "PLAYING WARI, BARBADOS"

In Herskovits' 1932 article on Wari in the Americas, he mentions that in Suriname, only certain men are allowed to make Wari boards and that these boards are used for a significant amount of time, though he does not specify exactly how long. While these excavations in Barbados cannot shed light on the length of use of Wari boards, since they would not survive in the climate or soil, the use life of the surviving gaming pieces can be examined. There is no discernable pattern of either the continued preservation and use of older pieces or the regular production of new ones. At the Moore Hill site, modern and historic marbles and ceramic gaming pieces dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries

were all found in the same context. Conversely, at the Mason Hall site, the two ceramic gaming pieces found in contexts with dateable pipe stems both dated to within a few decades of the date of pipe stem manufacture. There are, admittedly, several issues with this data, many of which, such as those regarding context, have been described above. Most importantly, the sample size is very small. What the chronology and pipe stem data from the Mason Hall site can confirm (see Table 1), however, is that gaming was taking place from an early point in the island's colonial history, at least since the late 17th century. The testimony of one modern Bajan, who recalls making and playing with these pieces, brings the use of these pieces all the way into the modern era (Stephanie Bergman, personal communication 2009).

Table 1: Pipe Stem Bore Diameter Dates For Contexts Associated with Gaming Pieces at the Mason Hall Site

Context	Number of Pipe Stems	Average Diameter (x/64)	Harrington Date (1954)	Binford Date (1962)	Heighton and Deagan Date (1971)	Associated Gaming Artifacts	Mean Ceramic Date for Gaming Disks
Tu 6 Lvl 1	20	5.15	1720-1750	1734.8	1737.4	Disk MH 7, marble, ballast stones	1710
Tu 8 Lvl 1	17	5.12	1720-1750	1736.0	1738.5	Ballast stones	N/A
Tu 8 Lvl 2	10	5.20	1720-1750	1732.9	1735.7	Disk MH 5	1720
Tu 8 Lvl 4	8	7.50	1650-1680	1644.9	1670.0	N/A	N/A
Tu 8 Lvl 5	1	7.00	1650-1680	1664.0	1682.3	Marble	N/A

Similar gaming pieces have been found in archaeological contexts throughout Barbados. In addition to the sites already discussed, excavations at Holetown (Smith 2004:59) and the synagogue in Bridgetown (see Figure 10) have also revealed ceramic disks. These pieces show that while there is a paucity of evidence for gaming in Barbados in the historical record, it was an important and widespread activity among the enslaved. Bioarchaeological studies illustrate some of the difficulties in the lives of the enslaved. In Handler and Corruccini's (1983) study of the slave cemetery at Newton Plantation, a majority of the human remains showed signs of severe nutritional stress and/or disease. They also estimated that the average life expectancy for this group was less than 30 years. Gaming would have not only provided welcomed diversion from their stressful lives, but would have also been a means of maintaining traditions and beliefs from the land of their ancestors. It could also have given the enslaved a means of control over their own identity and place in society, as will be described in the next section.

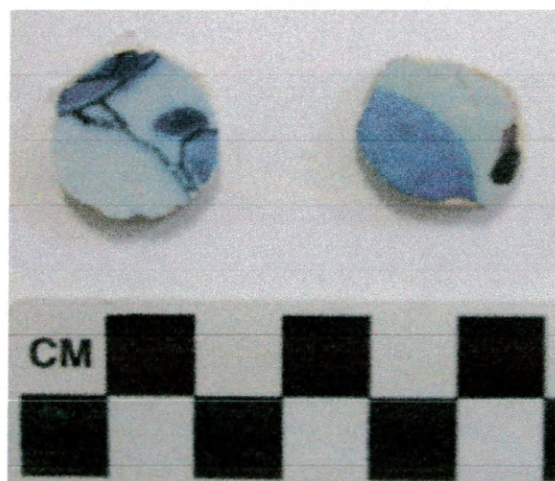


Figure 10: Gaming pieces found during excavations at the synagogue in Bridgetown

Gaming as a Demonstration of Identity, Agency, and Power

Gaming and Identity

The concept of an identity is integral to being human. If humans did not feel the need to define themselves, archaeologists would not exist. Leone, et al (1987) and Shanks and Tilley (1987) clearly and full throatily state that the investigation and description of the people of the past is an imperative procedure that allows people from the present to relate themselves to others in the past and define themselves in the process. Just as the people that make up today's cultures are not homogenous, easily defined groups, neither were the people of the past. In the past, archaeologists often made these kinds of errors and assumptions to facilitate their normative view of culture and the processes that went along with it. To reduce a person's identity to the style of pottery they made or the kind of house they built is not only overly simplistic, but also does damage to a unique archaeological agent and gives them an identity of only a single dimension based on their perceived occupation, religion, or some other characteristic. As Fowler says in the introduction to his edited volume on personhood,

archaeologies of personhood... need to attend to the cultural motivations that guide people, and people's strategies for negotiating those motivations, as well as the identities that are produced by social interaction [2004:4].

It is especially important to recognize the archaeological remains of enslaved Africans as the remnants of the actions of individuals since, unlike the Europeans who enslaved them, they usually did not leave behind journals or other written materials that could aid researchers in their search for information.

Now we are left with the question of how to find individuality in the gaming practices of enslaved Africans. Each ceramic piece contains information about its creator, though usually this information is not obvious. To make a gaming piece, the creator had to select pottery based on several criteria. First, he or she would have to find his or her preferred material (if they had one), then select pieces they felt were appropriately decorated. As stated earlier, most gaming pieces have decoration on only one side, and that decoration varies greatly. There would have been plenty of opportunities for an individual's personal style to be reflected in the gaming piece they create. This kind of inventiveness and creativity is essential to the idea that an individual may be part of a society, but is not completely defined and restricted by that group (Merkell 1999:21-22). A more ephemeral place for individuality in gaming is the way a person chooses to play a game. Each individual could have their own favored strategies and tricks that they believe will help them win, such as the markings Russell (1997:71) found on the marble recovered in Tennessee. Each instance a person plays a game is also different from every other, whether it is because their opponent(s) changes or they are in a different emotional state. As Gulliver poignantly explains:

In concerning ourselves with decision making, or indeed with the playing of roles and interacting of all kinds, we seem to be compelled to assume a rationality in men that we know by experience is often absent. Men can misconceive a situation and its possibilities; they can be stimulated by high emotion or by depression, to make moves and decisions that otherwise they might not; they can be stupid, obstinate, short-sighted, or something somewhere in between; they may be greedy or generous, intolerant or tolerant, and so on [1971:356-357].

Therefore, we cannot reduce gaming down to simple sets of rules and outcomes. Each time a game is played, there is a fallible human playing against other fallible humans; and each time both the simple outcome of who wins or loses and the more significant outcomes that affect social status will be inherently different than every other time that game is played. We can, however, arrive at generalizations of typical outcomes and meanings, as long as we recognize that our conclusions are generalizations and not rules.

Another important aspect of identity that must be explored with regards to gaming is age. Archaeologists have traditionally analyzed societies as if they were entirely made of adults in their prime. However, it should be obvious that, as is true today, the past was a dynamic place where people were constantly being born, growing up and old, and dying. We cannot necessarily relegate the act of gaming to only children or adults (Lucy 2005). Instead, we must consider the possibilities that perhaps some games were generally preferred by the

young, some by adults, and others by seniors. On the other hand, as in the case of Wari in the Caribbean, people of all ages could play the same game (Cruikshank 1929:180). It could also be possible that preference simply depended on the individual and circumstances unrelated to age. Ultimately, archaeologists need to recognize in their imaginings of the past that interactions involving gaming (and all social interactions for that matter) were not comprised of a single age-group; that, instead, the community was made up of a variety of individuals who engaged in gaming with one another- as exemplified by the ethnographic accounts of both children and adults playing Wari, as noted above. How else would younger generations learn how to play games unless members of older generations included them in interactions where gaming was involved?

Gaming and Agency

Johnson (1999:104) described agency as it applies to archaeology and the past as the “active strategies of individuals”. It is clear from the descriptions of individuality in gaming described above, that there is also a great deal of agency in this social interaction and all that it encompasses. Agency is theorized in everything from the decision of the enslaved to choose to play a certain game, create and gather necessary materials for the game, the way the individual actually plays the game, and more (Johnson 1999). As described earlier, even though games are defined by the rules of how one is supposed to play, people do not always choose to explicitly follow those rules.

Agency is more than how someone plays a game strategically. It is also reflected in their awareness of the game and its consequences. When a person chooses to play a game, they understand that there will be consequences to how they play that game (many out of their control), and that there will be social consequences and actions related to the gaming activities immediately preceding and following the game (Barrett 2000:65-66). Even though the enslaved were stripped of their material goods when they were taken to the Caribbean, they still had the knowledge of the games they played in Africa, and chose to recreate those games with the materials they found in their new home (Handler 2009b:12). These actions are interpreted as cultural resistance by some (Singleton 2001:110), though it is not clear whether that was the intent of the enslaved. What is clear is that the enslaved were given a limited amount of resources, and they actively modified those resources so they could engage in a social activity they deemed important: gaming. Despite the structural limitations and other restrictions placed on a person, there is always room for decisions and actions, and therefore agency (Wobst 2000:41).

Gaming and Power

The condition of slavery seems to make a person powerless: they lose the ability to easily and openly make many decisions for and about themselves, and most obviously, they seem to lose most control over their physicality. However, as discussed in the section on agency, it is impossible for a person to lose all of their control, and thus, all of their power. Power cannot be completely held by

one person or group because there are elements of power in every social interaction, including gaming (O'Donovan 2002:5). Even though it may have appeared all enslaved Africans were equal in their condition, they each had their own skills and unique identities to set them apart and create different social hierarchies.

From ethnographic research, it is clear that gaming held great significance in many African cultures. Those who were adept at certain games gained prestige and status in the community because of their skill. Thus, games often became very intense, and fights over them were not infrequent (Zaslavsky 1973:121). It can also be assumed that since games were sometimes identical to divination practices (for example, Igba-ita) (Ibid), that people who were adept at the game would also be considered proficient at this alternate purpose and a valuable asset to use when this type of service was needed. In Africa, wagers are also frequently made during the game, so a skilled person could also obtain immediate material gains that could increase their power within the community. Thus, the skill and dominance demonstrated during a game do not end when the game does, but continues to affect the players in other social actions.

While some may rightly question using a direct analogy to equate the social meaning and consequences of game playing in Africa with the same games that were played in the Caribbean by enslaved Africans, we can still assert that at a minimum there are power relations that are negotiated during a game. However, because other avenues to obtain power were restricted for the enslaved, it would seem logical that they would exploit the potential to gain power

from gaming to the fullest. Power does not always manifest itself overtly; often it can be seen simply as being imbued in whoever can exert the most control over a social situation (Foucault 1982:789-790). Thus, in gaming, a person can gain power not only by winning a game, but also by choosing which game to play, hosting the location of the game, and controlling the social interactions that occur during the game.

Eric Wolf outlines four types of power; the power of the individual to act, the power of one individual over another, the power to dictate what happens in a situation, and finally, the power to control the setting itself (1990:586-587). The gaming practices of the enslaved Africans in the Caribbean demonstrate the first three types of power. Individually, the enslaved had the power to create gaming pieces and choose to play with them. Then, when they engaged in a game, as described above, there was a struggle of power to demonstrate skill and dominate the other on the game board, and in turn, gain social power that continued when the game ended. Finally, again, as described above, the person who hosted the game had the power to choose when and where he or she would make the game available to be played.

Discussion and Conclusions

While this paper has concentrated its efforts on discovering evidence of African-derived games played by the enslaved, it is not intended to imply that those were the only games they played. Evidence of this can be found in a gaming die found at the Jubilee Gardens Site (see Figure 11). In addition, there are countless games that have been played by all cultures throughout history that leave no material evidence of their existence. For example, some of the most popular children's games in Africa are based on songs and verbal responses (Simmons 1958). What is clear from the evidence presented here, however, is that enslaved Africans preserved and modified gaming traditions from their homeland, and in later generations, memories of a homeland, and continued to practice them in the Americas into the modern era.

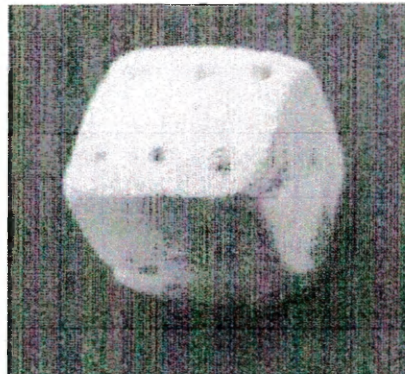


Figure 11: Die found in Jubilee Gardens Excavation (from Smith and Watson 2007:196)

The widespread finds of similar forms of gaming pieces, particularly the unique ceramic pieces, show that enslaved Africans throughout North America and the Caribbean were not only engaging in gaming activities, but that they

were playing the same games thousands of miles apart. The few references to this game using ceramic pieces from historical documents supports the idea that these artifacts were being used to play a version of a west African game that the slaves brought with them to the New World in their memory. Once they established their new homes, slaves improvised these pieces to replace the cowrie shells and coins they once used, but no longer had access to. It also follows that, while there is less evidence for the popular game Mancala in the Americas, it was likely played there too. There is a strong tradition for Wari, the Caribbean version of the game, and the organic materials typically used for game boards and pieces would be unlikely to survive in the archaeological record. It is easy to imagine a market setting in the 18th century, such as the Jubilee Gardens site, where the enslaved gathered not only to barter, but to socialize and play the games their ancestors enjoyed in their native Africa.

The archaeological investigation of gaming and other leisure time activities is necessary in order to fully recognize enslaved Africans as individual human beings and not just a captured labor force. It is also important to remember that all types of individuals within the enslaved community- young and old, male and female, engaged in gaming and leisure time activities. Gaming is a relatively personal, small-scale social event; yet it can have significant consequences for a person within their community. In the case of enslaved Africans in the Americas, it is clear that gaming allowed them to express their individuality and vie for power within their community.

The enslaved were stripped of most, if not all, of their material possessions when they were taken from Africa, yet they chose to recreate the material culture associated with gaming that they had used in their homeland. The process of making the choices to actively find material to make gaming pieces and play their preferred games is a perfect illustration of the agency and power held by the enslaved. As stated earlier, gaming was likely used as a conduit to social power among the enslaved community, as it had been in Africa. The difference with the situation in the Americas was that it was one of the few ways the enslaved had to express themselves in this way, since so many other aspects of their lives were rigorously controlled. For the enslaved Africans, gaming was already tied to ideas of spirituality and power in their homeland. When transferred to the Americas, skill at gaming was a means of attaining status and identity in a setting where so much of their power had been stripped away by the system of slavery. This idea of gaining power through gaming continues on today, where poker stars are idolized for their ability to win large sums of money, and chess masters have movies and books made about them.

While the masters who held the Africans captive took a great deal of control over their lives, they could not hold complete power. Power exists in every social interaction, big or small, and the arena of gaming was one place where enslaved Africans still had complete control over their identity. More ethnographic and archaeological studies are needed to examine the extent of the importance of this type of social interaction.

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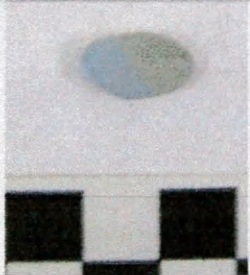



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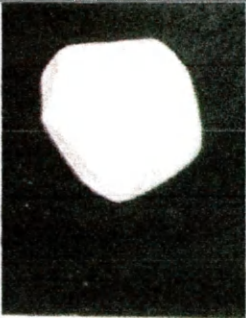
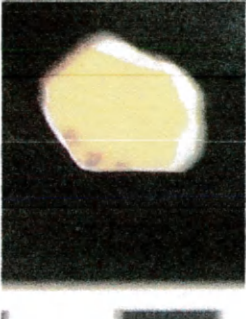
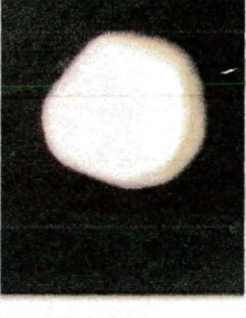
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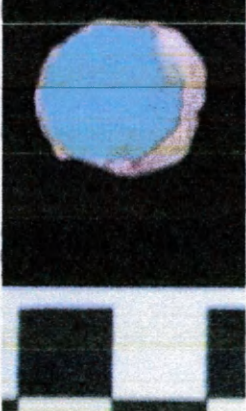
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Appendix A: Ceramic Gaming Pieces Found in Barbados

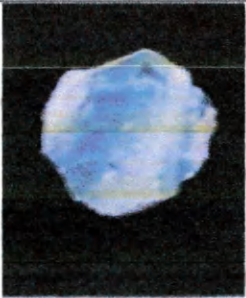

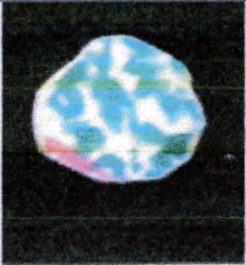
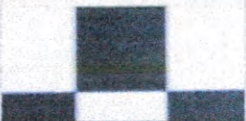
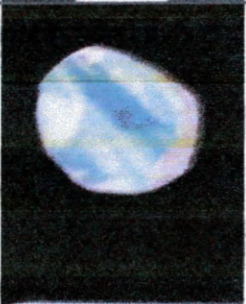
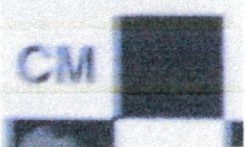
Gaming Piece	Diameter (cm)	Material	Background Color	Primary Decoration Color	Production Date Range	Mean Date	Photo
JG 1 (Jubilee Gardens)	1.5 (Oval piece)	Annular ware	Cream	Blue (Polychrome)	1785 1840	1812.5	
JG 2	2.5	Whiteware	White	Blue	1830 2009	1919.5	
JG 3	3	Delft	White	Blue	1630 1790	1710	
MH 1 (Mason Hall)	2.2	Delft	White	Blue (Polychrome)	1571 1790	1680.5	

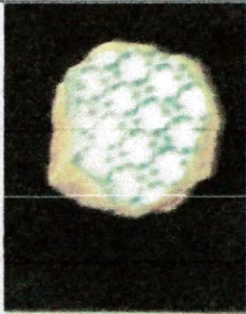


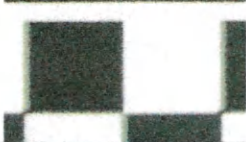
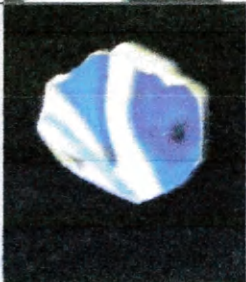

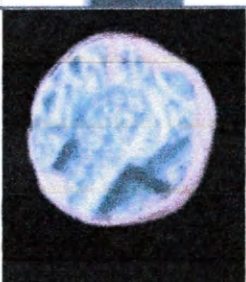

¹ According to the Florida Museum of Natural History's Digital Type Collection


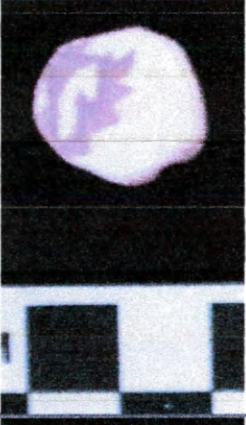

MH 2	2.1	Creamware	White	N/A	1765	1810	1787.5	
MH 3	1.8	Pearlware	White	Yellow (Polychrome)	1795	1820	1807.5	
MH 4	1.5	Majolica	Cream	N/A	1500	1650	1575	



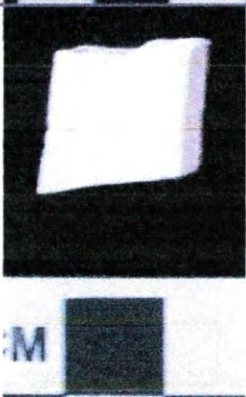

MH 5 (TU8 L2)	2.5	Delft	White	N/A	1640	1800	1720	
MH 6 (TU4 L1)	2.5	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	
MH 7 (TU6 L1)	2.2	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	
MR 1 (Moore Hill House)	2	Delft	White	Blue	1571	1790	1680.5	


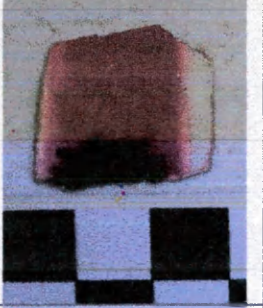
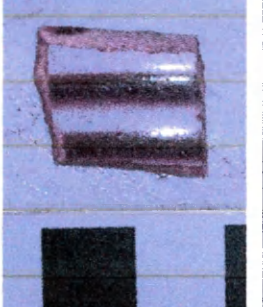

MR 10	2.1	Talavera	White	Grey	1590	1750	1670	
MR 11	3	Delft	White	Black	1571	1790	1680.5	
MR 12	2.3	Porcelain	White	Pink (Polychrome)	1680	1850	1765	
MR 13	2	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	

MR 14	2.1	Stoneware	Grey	Blue	1575	1775	1675	
								
MR 15	2.1	Delft	White	Green	1571	1790	1680.5	
								
MR 16	1.9	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	
								

MR 17	2	Pearlware	White	Green	1795	1820	1807.5	
								
MR 18	2	Pearlware	White	Green	1830	1840	1835	
								
MR 19	2.4	Pearlware	White	Blue	1775	1840	1807.5	
								
MR 2	2.2	Delft	White	Blue	1571	1790	1680.5	
								

MR 3	2.1	Delft	White	Blue	1571	1790	1680.5	
MR 4	2.1	Majolica	White	Purple	1650	1750	1700	
MR 5	2.4	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	

MR 6	2	Delft	White	Blue	1630	1790	1710	
MR 7	2.8	Pearlware	White	Green (polychrome)	1830	1840	1835	
MR 8	2	Delft	White	N/A	1640	1800	1720	
MR 9	2	Pearlware	White	Green	1830	1840	1835	

NY 1 (Negro Yard)	2	Whiteware	White	Blue	1830	2009	1919.5	
NY 2	2.5	Annular ware	Cream	Orange (Polychrome)	1795	1895	1845	
NY 3	1.9	Annular Ware	White	Brown	1795	1895	1845	
NY 4	2	Creamware	Cream	N/A	1762	1820	1791	
NY 5	1.9	Creamware	Cream	N/A	1762	1820	1791	